

WOODEN SHOE BOOKS

508 South 5th Steet

Philelphia, PA 19147



(215) - 413 - 0999



www.woodenshoebooks.org

Open Sun-Thurs 12-10, Fri & Sat 12-11

ACROSS THREE DECADES OF ANARCHISM

This history is the result of one collective member's project. Other members, or the collective as a whole, may not agree with everything written.

Written in late 2004. Formatted in June 2006.

*A Brief History of the Wooden
Shoe Collective, an All-Volunteer
Anarchist Infoshop* by James G.

I had always been political, but never had a home to call my own. I may have swayed from one ideology to another, but my core beliefs never changed too much. One early evening, when I was seventeen in 2000, while wandering around the Bohemian district of South Street, Philadelphia, I walked into a small bookstore that would change the course of my life, bring me a community of people I could relate with, and give me confidence in my abilities as a human being to be able to work on political causes (and actually win). Later that year, I would become involved in the bookstore. Four years later, I still am involved in Wooden Shoe Books and Records.

There is, however, a catch. The Wooden Shoe, affectionately called "the Shoe" by its members and customers, is also an avowedly Anarchist bookstore. Anarchism fully endorses the ideology shared with famous figures like Mikael Bakunin, Emma Goldman, Peter Kropotkin, Alexander Berkman, and was hugely influential in European and American political movements. Also commonly referred to as "libertarian socialism", in that they believe in decentralized socialism without the government. The Anarchist tradition in America played a big part in the American left before the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 replaced Anarchists with Communists as the dominant left-wing organization. In the 1960s, many of the grassroots movements were influenced by Anarchist philosophy of decentralized resistance to achieve social change. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Anarchism resurfaced as a political movement to be taken seriously, since state Communism had been largely discredited. Noam Chomsky, Murray Bookchin, and Howard Zinn are all recognizable names today who either describe themselves as Anarchists or admit that Anarchism plays a huge part of their influences.

The Wooden Shoe is run by volunteers, who dedicate some of

- 1 - Wooden Shoe News, Issue 2, 1978 p. 1
- 2 - Scott. Personal Interview. 31st of October, 2004
- 3 - Bull. Personal Interview. 3rd of November, 2004
- 4 - Rachel. Personal Interview. 3rd of November, 2004
- 5 - Lisbeth. Personal Interview. 23rd of November 2004, via Email.
- 6 - Scott
- 7 - Scott
- 8 - Alexis. Personal Interview. 6th of November 2004
- 9 - Bull.
- 10 - Scott
- 11 - Albo. Personal Interview. 2nd of November, 2004
- 12 - Alexis
- 13 - Wooden Shoe Notes, Issue 1, 1978
- 14 - Wooden Shoe News, Issue 2 1978, p. 1
- 15 - Wooden Shoe News, Issue 6 1980, p. 4
- 16 - Wooden Shoe News, Issue 5, p. 1
- 17 - Wooden Shoe News, Issue 6, p. 1
- 18 - Wooden Shoe News, Issue 1, p. 2 1978
- 19 - Albo
- 20 - Alexis
- 21 - Wooden Shoe News, Issue 3, p. 2
- 22 - Albo
- 23 - Alexis
- 24 - April, April. 6 7th of November, 2004.
- 25 - Albo
- 26 - Rachel
- 27 - Spryt. Personal Interview. 16th of November, 2004
- 28 - Spryt
- 29 - Albo
- 30 - "A short history of Wooden Shoe Books" <http://woodenshoobooks.org/history.html>
- 31 - Scott
- 32 - Rachel
- 33 - Alexis
- 34 - "Wooden Shoe Bookstore In Philadelphia Burns" In Philadelphia Burns Davids, Julie. February 12th, 1997. www.infoshop.org/NEWS/shoe.html
- 35 - Scott
- 36 - April
- 37 - April
- 38 - April
- 39 - Scott
- 40 - April
- 41 - Spryt

their free time to spreading these ideas. It is a democratic collective, run by consensus, which means any decision made must have the consent of all present at meetings. The type of organization is commonly referred to as an "infoshop". Most major cities have one in America, including Left Bank in Seattle, Lucy Parsons in Boston, Brian MacKenzie in Washington, DC, May Day Books in New York City, Bound Together Books in San Francisco, Long Haul in Oakland, and Boxcar Books in Bloomington, Indiana, to name a few. The Wooden Shoe sees itself as a sister-shop to the many across the entire country. They serve as a nerve center of information for radical political activists who want to know what is going on in the city, as well as a place where interested people can receive their political education.

The Wooden Shoe sells radical and politically left-wing books on every type of subject. The subjects of the bookstore include Anarchism, radical philosophy, Situationalism, media, technology, political commentary, prisons, legal issues, racism, American history, American politics, world history, imperialism, counter-intelligence, pacifism, activism, group process, labor, fiction, sci-fi, art, music, biography, Europe, the Spanish Civil War, Spanish language books, Latin America, Latino/a Americans, Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, East Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, Africa, spirituality, transgender, Atheism, feminism/womens' issues, GLBQ, urbanization, transportation, environmentalism, animal rights, vegetarian and vegetarian cookbooks, poetry, sexuality, how-to guides, self-defense, drugs and marijuana, subcultures, punk rock, comics, zines, conspiracy, parenting, and radical children's books. In addition, the Wooden Shoe sells music including underground rock, folk, hip-hop, and spoken word. It sells radical political magazines, newspapers, independent fanzines, and Anarchist pamphlets. It also carries flyers about events such as protests,

author events, teach-ins, movie showings, underground music shows, and classifieds.

When I set out to do this project, the purpose was to detail the exact history of the Wooden Shoe in order so that we as a collective could not only learn from our past, but provide history for others involved in similar projects. The idea originally arose when reading the "10th Anniversary Zine of the Long Haul Infoshop," which is in Berkeley/Oakland, California, and was a collection of interviews and stories.

The Wooden Shoe has been around for twenty-eight years, which is very impressive for any business, let alone a democratically run business who's goal is not profit, but a kind of anti-profit. It seeks to overturn capitalism and the state by using its weaknesses against it, through education and agitation, similar to how the Huns used the roads that Rome built to sweep into Italy and bring the Roman Empire to its end. I sought out people who have been involved in the project for more than five years, for the simple fact that, as an all-volunteer organization, there is, and has historically been, a high turn-over rate of people involved as staffers. In this first draft of the Wooden Shoe's history, I interviewed seven people in person, and two over e-mail, and I intend on interviewing several more in future updates of this history.

Interviewed here are Scott, Rachel, Bull, Albo, April, Spryt, and Alexis. Most of the interviews took place in the backyard of the Wooden Shoe, my tape recorder in hand. Each interviewee received similar questions. The purpose was to get not only the history of the Wooden Shoe, but also to get a feel for the person's ideological background and ideas on organizing. The purpose was to hear some stories, especially since this author never saw the old Wooden Shoe on 20th street. I also had access to the Wooden Shoe News,

or mostly white people. Nearly everyone recognizes it as a deadly circle, since people from white middle class backgrounds generally have more time, the organization serves other people from those backgrounds. It is also a bookstore, so intellectuals tend to congregate there, and the store in turn tends to serve people interested in education, instead of reaching out to others who might not otherwise be politicized. (39) Because the Wooden Shoe also still exists within mainstream society, some of its power dynamics still replicate mainstream society. (40) For instance, because of male tendency to be able to be able to express himself in an open environment, Rachel ventures, the store has always had more men than women doing important positions, even though there has always been a nearly equal amount of men and women within the collective. Men tend to get more credit than women within the store, much like within mainstream society, which is unfortunate, but a product of our social upbringing. (41)

Today, the Wooden Shoe continues to try to reinvent itself and keep moving forward, like the doorstep outside says. It is working on attaining non-profit tax status, and some of its long term goals are to obtain a building of its own, instead of paying rent. While the people I have interviewed here are a little more experienced, within the collective today exist a core group that have come along in the past two or three years who are not mentioned in this essay, nor are the dozens of other people who have been involved in the collective over the twenty-eight years of its existence. However, the current day Wooden Shoe is a product of all of their time, labor, sweat, tears, joy and ingenuity that makes it special. There are hundreds of stories of events that happened in the store, not possible to say in this little space. It is a lot bigger than anyone person can possibly imagine, and continues to make history in Philadelphia by keeping ideas well and alive in action.

the new location also housed the radical Jewish newspaper, Forward, in the early part of the century, when the South street area was a Russian-Jewish immigrant neighborhood. (37) Though the fire was indeed an accident, the store revitalized the energies of the collective. Through the past eight years, it has grown to become a medium sized collective of around thirty-five staffers. In this author's experience, the collective remains flexible to any situation that arises. For instance, in 2001, after a major theft by an ex-staffer, the collective remodeled some of its financial practices in order to make it impossible for anyone to do the same ever again.

What attracts someone to a place like the Wooden Shoe? The original intent of the collective was to establish something that people could feel was a more tangible gain than just a protest, but over the course of the years, it became so much more. Since so many people working within the store were and are involved in other political activist groups, it became a great place for people to network and meet. Radical labor groups, like the Industrial Workers of the World, Aids advocacy groups like ACT-UP, the Kensington Welfare Rights Union, Books Through Bars (a group that gets books to prisoners) and other long-time Philadelphia-based groups have always found a home in the Wooden Shoe, as well as various underground music, fanzines, literature projects, and others. (In fact, Books Through Bars actually uses the Wooden Shoe to store books in its basement) April notes that she found that the collective felt like a "peer group" (38) whom she could feel comfortable with. As a nerve center of information and contacts, the Wooden Shoe provides a counter-institution service for society.

The Wooden Shoe may have limitations, like serving a politicized group that has its current roots in middle class white subcultures. The members of the collective have nearly always been all

which ran from 1978 to 1980 (?), and several newspaper articles. The Collective functions smoothly by using the energy and initiative of its members. As will be illustrated, the kind of things that the Wooden Shoe has done throughout its existence depended on what members wanted to focus on.

A person comes into the collective by stepping forward and making it known that they want to become a staffer. They go through a training period. Then, they get keys after they have proven their trustworthiness to the collective. Over the course of its history, the way in which it was done has changed, depending on the level of organization. In the 1970s, "new people who want to get involved in the store first work at the store and attend store meetings; then if the person and the collective are mutually agreeable, the person is voted into the collective." (1) By the time the author became involved, the way people trained was much looser. However, just four years later, that changed so that only set trainers or experienced staffers could train people, and the collective strictly enforces a three trainings requirement for new staffers. Then, they receive acceptance or rejection by the collective at a general meeting, which happens once a month. After all, it is a business, while not a profit-oriented business, and the collective has to make sure that it keeps itself open. How does it compromise its ethics with its business practices?

S: I think that when you look at any operation where you need activism, people take a minute to really internalize it. The fact is that you can't live outside of capitalist society; even if you're one of these folks that just wants to eat every meal out of a dumpster, shoplift all your clothes and stuff. Obviously you're still living off of capitalism even if you're not directly consuming or spending money for your consumption, though you are still consuming, and your consumption still does have an impact, especially if you're stealing. Even if

you're one of those folks, you're still existing in a large social system which is capitalism.

Taking that as a given from the start, you have to accept certain things. One; trying to do everything in a non-capitalist way will not work. You have to find things that are going to be effective. Two; even things that are so-called capitalist ways of doing things can be done in slightly different ways that are really not fully accepting the whole capitalist world view.

I'll give an example. Just basically having a commitment to doing things well. The punk rock scene, which is the most recent phrase of the subculture movement which came up as a response to consumer capitalism, (which really was flowering and expanding into all corners of society in roughly the 1950s), the punk movement, which one hand had a really egalitarian message of anyone could take part in this movement. It wasn't just a few rock stars on stage and everyone sitting back and cheering them. The idea was that anyone could be on stage and anyone could be doing whatever, including zines and so-forth. So that's very, very positive and very important.

But on the other half of it was that, it really didn't matter if you did anything well. If you just got up there and just tried to do something, that was just as good as someone who really put the time and energy into doing something well. Everything in capitalism, and everything that is a response to capitalism, which by definition is still capitalism, has both libratory tendencies and tendencies towards failing to be libratory, if that is the goal.

I'd say that in these kinds of collectives and such, you have to have some kinds of commitment towards doing it well. In capitalism, if you're running a business, you have to run the business as a

This was one of them.

I turned the corner at 20th street to head down towards my work, and I realized that it was the Wooden Shoe that was on fire. So I was the first person who was at all involved with the Wooden Shoe to discover that the Wooden Shoe had burnt down. I was totally dumbstruck when I saw it. "I can't fucking believe the Wooden Shoe is on fire!" It was horrible! I didn't know what to do!

I just stood there for like 10 minutes or so, and was even later to work, watching as the firefighters were just dumping water in. Smoke was billowing up the top of it. I was shocked. Totally felt shocked. So I went to my work, (this was about 7:30 in the morning), and I called Albo. I woke him up. He thought I was playing a practical joke on him, for some reason. I had to convince him on the phone that I was serious: That the Wooden Shoe had really burnt down.

I kept leaving work throughout the day, and going over. I saw Albo and his hip waiters going in and out of the basement pulling out floating books, mixing up piles on the sidewalk of charred water damaged books, to later be sold at benefits for the new Wooden Shoe. It was a sad day, but ended up being a very good thing in the end. That's my Wooden Shoe story. (36)

The Wooden Shoe dedicated itself to reopening the store in a bigger and better way, and to move past just being a record shop that sold a few books on the side, but to try to return to its participation in social change movements, as it had fifteen years before. They pulled together, and after a few benefit shows for fundraising, April found the new location at 508 S. 5th street, right off of the busy tourist filled small-shop district of South street. Fittingly,

The Wooden Shoe on 20th and Sansom burnt to the ground on February 12, Ash Wednesday, 1997 in an electrical fire. (34) It can be almost universally agreed upon that the burning down of the old Wooden Shoe was the best possible thing that could have happened to the declining organization. The store, like a phoenix from the ashes, received the opportunity to remake what the collective was, and what it did. As a sense of relief settled, in the words of Scott, "Goddamn, I don't have to worry about the fucking Wooden Shoe today. Because it BURNED DOWN!" (35) Thankfully, the collective had taken out an insurance policy and the Wooden Shoe received a large sum of money from the accident. In a communication announcing the death of the old store, you can sense an Anarchist sense of humor:

The only good news (besides the insurance) is that the fire really fucked with rush hour traffic, significantly delaying the time it took to drive to a lousy center city job. It was a 4 alarm fire.

Bull remembers the day with clarity. I was going to work one day at the Health Food store, that I worked at before I worked at the Food Co-op. It was two blocks away from the Wooden Shoe. And I was living in East Falls at the time, so I was taking the bus in. (For some reason, I usually rode my bike in, but whatever, that's not important.) The bus was going down Chestnut street, and it stopped at 21st, and then it had to make a detour. So I got off there, and decided to just walk to work, since I was already late, and potentially much later if I had to take the detour.

And then, I realized there was a fire, somewhere in the general direction of my work, and I got all excited, because I thought my work had burnt down. Which for some reason, within a one-block radius of the store that I worked at, there were five pretty serious fires, over the course of the seven years that I worked there.

business. That doesn't mean you have accept everything that a mainstream traditional profit-oriented business accepts. Of course not, there's a lot of stuff, there's a huge number of things that you have to consciously toss out and reject. That means things like being open when you say you're going to be open, or having products that people expect you to have. Those things are essential. I don't care what you call it. You can call it common sense. You can call it good business. You can call it a commitment to providing revolutionary services. Whatever you want to call it, I don't care. But you have to do that if you want to be successful.

Again with the Wooden Shoe, back in the mid-seventies, you didn't have a group of people who were totally inexperienced with organizing. These were people who had been through doing various kinds of organizing. They had also been, in their personal lives, though whatever kinds of phases where they're purely reacting against dominant culture and not attempting to come up with positive solutions. So I think really that's the biggest advantage at I think the current group isn't really aware of. We had a group of people who founded the store who had some solid basic ideas about how to run the store. We've really stuck to most of those things in roughly those ways.

Anyways, if you look at businesses in general, most of them fail within a year. That's the reality. Why would infoshops be any different? You're existing within the capitalist system. Whether it's a group of people trying to do an infoshop or people running a traditional business. It takes time to figure out how to do that. It takes time to get out there and let people know about you, it's really no different. (2)

The collective uses consensus, which most would agree has advantages and disadvantages. In consensus, everyone must agree

to a decision when it is made. Members have three options when it comes to any decision. They may block a decision if they can't agree with it, in which case the group tries to reach a mutually agreeable compromise. Members may also stand aside, which means they are not blocking the decision making, but they do not entirely agree with the decision. The third option is to concur with the decision. Most of the interviewees agree that the disadvantages are that it consumes a lot of time and can be corrupted if not followed in good faith. Decisions made carry the strength that the entire collective becomes focused on carrying out those decisions. There is enough basic agreement within the store that most of the time, decisions made in the Wooden Shoe that no major conflicts erupt. The collective is lucky, since other organizations in Philadelphia, like Mariposa Food Co-Op, have experienced major problems with consensus. It seems to work better in smaller organizations, like the Wooden Shoe, which has about twenty-five to thirty active members. (3) While it is not universal about whether the disadvantages outweigh the advantages, most everyone can agree that when a final decision is made by the group, the strength of the decision carries a lot of more weight than a simple majority rules decision, which can lead a group to fractionalization, unless its mission and goals are set and clear.

Some of the strong advantages are that when the decisions are made people are generally behind them because they, hopefully, feel that their concerns in reaching that decision were heard. It helps people feel good about the decisions that were reached, and that they weren't apart of the minority, and nobody listened to what they said, and things were happening the way they didn't want it to, because the majority said so.

You end up taking a lot more things into account than you would with a simple vote decision, or if a President of a board, or

7

It was kind of funny to kind of argue with her. There was a magazine at the time with Ed Herman, Noam Chomsky, and all these people used to do called "Lies Of Our Times" which was like a leftist critique of the New York Times. So I brought in copies. I got Ed Herman to write her a letter. Noam Chomsky went to Central, the high school I went to, so... I don't remember if he mailed a letter out.

So I was really pulling out all the stops to get this as the parallel. It was like, "If you have the New York Times, you have to have an alternative. So finding this out, it was like, okay, we were going to get some copies of it at the Wooden Shoe, which was to my knowledge the only place that it even sold.

So I bring her down to the Shoe, and there was this woman there. Anna was her name. She kind of hung out there a lot. She was talking to the Shoe staffer about how when we die, we go to another planet, and instead of having sex, you zip off your body and you feed it to the other person.. [laughs] It was like, "Oh my god!" Here it was I had spent all this time, trying to convince, persuade my teacher that, "This is credible. You'll love this store. They've got all kinds of great stuff. And within two minutes, everything is just like.. "What?... Uh.. I don't believe that." [laughs] The staffer at the time, this guy Karl, was like, "Come on, Anna, you're always saying this crazy non-sense! Nobody believes it!" You know kinda trying to make my teacher feel comfortable.

That was kind of the discussion that you might walk into in the Shoe. There was kind of a table in the middle of it. If anyone was sitting there, which usually there was, you'd have to excuse yourself and walk around them to look at the books, and that's not really good for business. (33)

profitmotive, you're gonna end up with something that's not gonna be serious. It's just gonna be people screwing around.

So anytime that we messed up, even for good reasons, it would magnified people's pre-existing prejudices that this was just something that was just kids screwing around essentially. So it was really important to me that we had to turn that around, we had to make sure that we were presenting a front as a group of people who were organized and committed towards doing something, even if at that time it was just a very limited project of running the store. (31)

Many people remember the old store as being a place where if you were not "in", it could be a little intimidating, though the structure was a little bit looser. As it became heavily tied to subcultures, people began to associate it with oddly dressed punk rockers, a "punk squat house". (32) It was a murky place filled with a lot of records. Many strange characters would hang around the store, making it seem even stranger to the average person walking by it. Alexis tells the story of when she tried to bring her teacher into the basement culture.

So I think that it's one major reason that the Shoe is set up so that people who aren't in a tight network of people who already know each other feel comfortable coming in. I don't feel that it was the case at Sansom Street. I'll tell you a story:

When I was in high school, our school let students develop classes with teachers. So I developed a class with a teacher called Central American Conflicts. I was really interested in Central America at the time. She wanted to use the New York Times as our textbook. I was like, "Ugh! The New York Times! It's so right-wing! Didn't you ever read Noam Chomsky? Like, come on now!"

somebody, was just making a decision for you. They wouldn't necessarily consider all the things that people bring up. It could be a lot more involvement of ideas to think about or use. It means that people have to talk about what they think, as opposed to just somebody posing just a choice. Even in just posing a choice, you've limited yourself to two things, or something. Usually. Not always. When you have to consense on stuff, there might be like six choices or something, for people to make, so I think it gives a lot more versatility.

The disadvantage is that it takes a long time. Sometimes you have to make the same decision over and over and over again. Like to rehash it a million times. It's difficult to figure out what to do when you can't reach consensus. So when like people are split so much that it's hard to actually come to a decision. (4)

Each collective member chooses their own level of involvement, based on their own schedule. The Wooden Shoe operates by people keeping the store open through staffing and people who take on extra responsibilities, such as bill paying (5), book ordering (6) and tax paying. The most important position in the store is the staffing coordinator position, who's responsibility it is to make sure that all of the shifts within the store are filled and to handle any staffing emergencies. The position is rotated monthly between members of the collective, ensuring that everyone within the collective is interested in staying on can develop leadership skills. The position came into existence in 1995, in order to combat the notion that Anarchists could not keep a business running.

The Wooden Shoe gets its name from the Leftist symbol of workers control, the sabot. A common legend of early resistance to industrial capitalism symbolizes the wooden shoes of the French

peasants, who were so poor they could wear nothing else but hardened wooden shoes, unlike the leather of the wealthy. The newly proletarianized peasants would toss the wooden shoes into the gears of the factory as a show of resistance, as well as in order to get a break after very long hours. The early founders of the Wooden Shoe collective were members of Philadelphia Solidarity, which was a group of labor orientated libertarian socialists, who were ex-members of the Socialist Labor Party. Therefore, they really wanted to focus their efforts on labor, as a group of working class intellectuals.(7,8)

The Wooden Shoe started in 1976. It was started by a collective of individuals that were interested in labor organizing but were not interested in working with any of the specific leftist groups, at the time, which were pretty much, to my understanding all various kinds of Marxist-Leninist groups, that had a strict party structure and such like that. These individuals wanted to have something that was more democratic, more egalitarian. There wasn't really, to my understanding, much unity beyond that, but it was enough unity to make the pretty big step of getting money together, finding a place, getting the place open, and so forth. There were anarchists involved, but to my knowledge, anarchists were not the largest grouping at that time.

The store opened its doors in December of 1976, by Philadelphia Solidarity and others interested in labor issues. It was located on 112 South 20th street, right near Sansom Street, in Philadelphia, PA, USA. It "was just a dark, nasty, basement [laughs] that was really cramped" (9), as Bull phrases it. In the mid 1970s, as the Vietnam War had just ended, and the social justice movements which had played such a big part in the course of American thought had been on the decline for several years. Many of the people who were involved in the social justice movements at the time were

So by the time I came, there was only a few long-standing members at that point. All of them had focuses outside the Wooden Shoe, in addition to the Wooden Shoe. There had been numerous days were the Wooden Shoe had been closed when it was supposed to be open. It had a reputation for just being this, not really being a center of activism, but instead being a center of a specific subculture scene and kind of associated with the weaknesses of that scene were defiantly seen in the Wooden Shoe. Weaknesses such as being a slacker-type place. You know, in general just not being a very serious thing.

So at that point, myself, I really wanted to be involved in something, but wasn't gonna be involved in something that was half-assed. I was gonna be involved in something that was real. [smiles] I instituted, at that point, the most important [laughs] job description in the Wooden Shoe which is the exalted Staffing Coordinator position, which I held that position for a couple years, [by] myself. That basically meant that there was somebody who was going to take responsibility for making sure the shifts were filled and in-turn making sure the store was open.

It became very immediately obvious to me that, any time we screwed up, anytime that we did something in which we failed to do our basic thing, like especially keeping the store open, that this would be magnified in the view of people, even people who were sympathetic, even people who really liked the Wooden Shoe in some cases. People would see reinforcing the view that it was a slacker operation, which is bla bla bla. The reality is that just as much as people are sympathetic to this sort of social change that people have subconscious beliefs that are drilled into them by mainstream society, drilled into them by education growing up, so on and so forth. That if you have something that is, you know, noncentralized hierarchy, something that isn't working for the

Alexis: *I felt security in knowing that (I don't know how to say it in a way without sounding Bushian) but a set of values, that prior to that, or like other things going on in my life, there wasn't really that kind of theory of human solidarity.*

For much of the 1980s, Albo devoted a large amount of time into the Wooden Shoe collective. He remains the bridge between the generations.

The old-school Socialist Labor Party renegades who started the store, he remained friendly with them, even when they were bugging out. Not wanting to deal with greenhaired youngsters, or whatever they were whining about. [laughs] (28)

Albo agrees. *I had a lot of free time in the eighties and early nineties, and I was willing to devote myself to the store, because I really cared about it. I mean, without me, it probably wouldn't be here. (29)*

During the 1980s through 1990s, the collective became looser and less organized. It stayed alive because of dedicated people who put time and energy into making sure that the ideas put out by the store would not disappear on their watch. Less people were doing more. The high-turnover of the collective limited the amount of things it could do, though it did host the Mid-Atlantic Anarchist Gathering in 1993, and served as the headquarters of a union drive by the Industrial Workers of the World at the Borders, after the firing of an organizer. (30) In the mid 1990s, many new members were getting involved, but the store was more or less at the same point it was at in the late 70s, in an old basement not doing very much.

looking for something a little more tangible and solid to establish. The people who founded the store came from a position of firsthand experience in organizing, being deeply rooted in the Civil Rights struggles, the New Left, and the Anti-War Movement. They already possessed skills necessary for keeping organizations going.

A lot of these folks had already been through various experiences doing organizing in the Peace Movement, Student Organizing and such like that. Kind of the Wooden Shoe was actually, for these individuals, kind of like a... how do you put? It was a step where they already had tried a lot of other kinds of organizing stuff, and they were trying to look for a way to make things a little more tangible, which in the mid-seventies was a choice a lot of different people made in different ways because by then, the Movement as a whole had been ebbing for a little while. There was a lot of disaffection with the political system as whole in society, but there really wasn't nearly as much organizing as there had been three or four years earlier. So a lot of people were looking for solid and tangible ways to applying that step. (10)

The intelligence of original members in setting up the organizational structure of the store. They were smart, and they set it up in a way that was sustainable. So that's defiantly a lot of it. (11)

People started to realize that, to make a real change, they needed to start their own institutions and provide a space for alternative ideas to get out there. Infoshops are a really big one for doing that because they provide our own media and all that. I don't know. I'm being very inarticulate, I'm sorry. [laughs]

I think also because they latched onto the idea, in Anarchism,

of building a new society in the shell of the old, and people get tired after a while of just going to protests and talking about how bad society is, and they want to build something that they can rely on, as something that they can nurture, and be apart of. (12)

The early collective may not have been explicitly Anarchist. It may have wanted to keep its political ideology non-specific to the Left. The early collective had ideas which were directly sympathetic to the ideas of Anarchism. It sought out authors who endorsed "council communism", which is yet another form of decentralized socialism, including the Yugoslav self-management philosopher Mihajlo Markovic, and featured labor and Socialist films, like *Children of Labor: A Finnish-American History* and *Eugene Debs and the American Movement*. The ideology and wording used back in the 1970s endorsed socialist project and authors, and used libertarian interchangeably with socialist, an example of how political language can change, since today libertarian is synonymous with pro-capitalism.

[The] Wooden Shoe wants to promote a radically different system of social organization and social relationships than exist anywhere in the world. We want a truly classless society. Throughout the world, in the capitalist West and the so-called socialist East, society is divided between classes of those who give orders and those who take orders, the bosses/managers/owners and the workers; the revolutionary party and the people; the teachers and the students, etc. (13)

The collective was arms deep in local events happening around the Philadelphia metropolitan area, which shows the level of commitment that the original members possessed. For instance, the newsletter includes descriptions of a protest in Limerick, PA on June 18th, 1978 against the construction of the nuclear power plant

and then Albo started working there. We worked together a lot and became friends. He, I think, also occasionally went to the Wooden Shoe, but wasn't involved, and then he bought a bunch of interesting pamphlets to give to a friend, and someone who staffing the Shoe invited him to either staff, or... there was an Anarchist study group at that point, and so he eventually started staffing and going to the Anarchist study group.

For a long time, I couldn't go to the Anarchist study group because I worked on that night, and after wanting to do it for a while, and not being able to do it, I started going to the Anarchist study group, and then, somewhere the same time, I started staffing.

It was really that the Anarchist Study Group and the Shoe staffers had a lot of overlap. At the time I got involved, there were people who had been doing it for a long time, and lot of younger people just getting involved in it.

A lot of the people who had been doing it for a long time were sort of burning out and turning stuff over. So they weren't coming to the Anarchist study group, but a lot of the newer and younger people were, but they weren't ALL young, they were just a lot of newer people. That would have been, I think, probably about '83, or '82. (26)

Spyt: So I went into Wooden Shoe, when it was on 20th street, to see if they'd buy an ad in my magazine, just because I was looking through all bookstores in the yellow pages. I wouldn't of even found them if I hadn't looked in the yellow pages [laughs]. That was in 1983 or 1984. The people there were really nice and bought an ad in my magazine. The guy who was working there lent me a bunch of stuff. He was like, "Well, here! You should read this! And this! And this!" And he lent me all this youth liberation stuff, which was very political. At the time, I was like, "Wowww."

It was sort of like a headquarters, like a place where people could commiserate who were in the very counter-counterculture of the last. A place that stood out in terms of it's willingness to talk. It wasn't like you had to be a complete lifestyle Anarchist to work at the Wooden Shoe, but it was encouraging a lot of different lifestyles. (24)

At this point, Albo and Rachel became involved in the store as part of that younger generation, and a few years later, Spryt came along the scene as well. They became apart of the collective in similar manners, recruited by members of the collective, who invited them into the radical political cultures. Members of the collective saw a good in all human beings, something attractive to youth.

Albo: *Wooden Shoe at that point sold a lot of used records, so I'd go in there and look at the records. I'd sort of look at the literature as well as the records. My actual initiation into the store culture was going into the store to buy Christmas presents for friends, and buying situationist pamphlets to give to some of my friends. One of the staffers at that point, Patti, looked at the stuff I was buying and said, "Hey, y'know, we have this Anarchist Study Group that meets once a week, and if you want, you can join us!"*

So I did, so I started doing the Anarchist Study Group. I did that for probably a year, and then some of the people within the study group said they wanted to form a group house, and I was thinking about moving into the city since I was already working in the city. So I joined this group house, which was about two blocks away from where the Wooden Shoe currently is. The rest is history. (25)

Rachel: *I was working [at another store] for a little while,*

there, which still stands twenty six years later. The author, Carl Croft, notes, "The CD [civil disobedience], though intended to be symbolic and small-scale at this time, was overly staged and too passive. CDers didn't sit-down or non-violently resist arrest." (14) Another anti-nuke demonstration took place in early 1980 in Seabrook, PA, though the action only had around 40 people, in a "direct action affinity group [which] has no name as yet." (15) Local Yippies, a leftover the New Left, even organized Rock Against Racism as early as 1979.

Through the start, the Wooden Shoe experimented with several different projects in order to get information out to the public. From the very beginning, the members recognized that the space that they were in was limiting their ability, since it was located in a basement, below ground. Several attempts to find a new place were made, though the collective never voluntarily moved from 20th and Sansom, even though the collective described their store as "our cramped subterranean quarters with hardly room to move or think." (16) In late 1979, the Wooden Shoe almost moved to 2032 Sansom Street, though it fell through. (17) They tried mail-order, starting a lending-library, and putting out a catalog of the titles carried at the store. After a while, the members of the collective decided that the best way to keep the store open while spreading ideas about libertarian socialism was to sell used records as well as literature. At the time, 20th street was a center of hippy bohemian counter-culture, and was a perfect spot to sell used records. The Shoe therefore, very early in its history, in 1978, made the conscious decision to alter between music and literature, therefore keeping one toe in the counter-culture world and one toe in the activist world, as Scott explains. After all, the early collective admitted, "*the used record trade is what actually keeps Wooden Shoe alive and well.*" (18)

That area up around on 20th and Sansom had been the little hippy shop area, where there were hippy stores. So that and South Street (South Street was kind of taking over at that point from that), South Street and that area were where you went if you were looking for alternative culture. (19)

Well, for many years, when we were at 20th and Sansom, I'd say that the Shoe's status was kind of tentative. Sometimes better, sometimes worse. But by the time I got there, the records inventory completely dominated the store, and it was consigned records. (20)

The store was vandalized on October 8, 1978, an incident famous in Wooden Shoe lore. Members of the collective and their friends dumped books, pamphlets, files, and records onto the floor, and then flooded the store's floor with water, ruining most of the inventory. Though the original members had suspicions who did it, they did not find out until several months later when the store was mailed a pamphlet, which filed the following charges against the collective:

We lead conventional lives; we sell commodities, we profit (false-WS pays no salaries and goes deeper in debt every year); we discourage shoplifters; we stifle revolution with books; we are not as serious, passionate, and sensitive as they. (21)

As Albo recalls, *Well, the big famous one was... I have no idea what year it was. Probably around 1980. Some people, at least one of whom was a staffer, became drunk on situationism, situationist ideas, as people often do when they're first exposed to them, and decided that the Wooden Shoe was commodifying dissent, and was too much apart of the system, and need to be... DESTROYED! [laughs] And they came into the store late one night,*

13

and blocked up the toilet and flooded the store, and poured lots and lots of books down into the water and destroyed lots and lots of the stock.

I wasn't around at that point, so I can't speak all that well about it. I know that, many years later, we got a letter from a woman who was involved with that group of people, who I actually think was the woman, the one who had been staffing at the store, apologizing, and saying she realized how stupid it was, and she sent us a little bit of money a few times. Maybe a hundred bucks or something, just to sort of, try to make up for it a little bit. (22)

By the early 1980s, the store became more openly Anarchist, and the old socialist perspective was slowly replaced. An Anarchist Study group met regularly at the Wooden Shoe, and around Philadelphia. Many of the older members began settling down, and a large generation gap developed between members who had been active in the early 1970s and newer people, as is noted by all of Wooden Shoe staffers who became involved in the 1980s.

It was an interesting contrast to see how those older members and people who were, I guess, in their early 20s, didn't exactly collide, but, by the time I was involved, it was fairly clear that the younger folks who had more energy at the time, won out, and the veteran folks were scratching their heads and trying to figure out how they were going to be involved. Or a lot of people started families, too, so that took them out of it. (23)

The Wooden Shoe made a shift from larger social change work into subcultures, specifically political punk rock and squatting.

14